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Uncovered coping strategies adopted by children living in homes with marital conflicts for their own survival

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Abstract
Research indicates that marital conflict pertains to three particular dimensions of communication including affect, conflict behaviours and conflict management and these affect conflict choice of management strategies. This paper explored the problems and coping strategies of children from homes with marital conflicts in Tanga City, Tanzania. An exploratory technique with multiple research methods was used to facilitate the study. 100 social workers, couples, class teachers and/or school counselors informed the study. The study employed purposive, stratified, simple random and snowball sampling techniques with survey questionnaires and interview to recruit participants and data collection. Problems facing children living in homes with marital conflicts are discussed. The result suggest that newlywed couples and those contemplating marriage should obtain marital counselling in order to build strong family relations that can reduce family life tensions, attending family training which developing marital problem-solving skills. The theoretical and practical implications of the problems facing children living in homes with marital conflicts in Tanzania are discussed.
Key words: coping strategies, children suffering, marital anxiety, sources of marital conflicts, marital conflict.

1. Introduction

A family as a universally agreed to be the smallest social structural unit which consists of mother, father and children (Hughes, & Kroehler, 2005), and has tough functions to fulfill such as provision of food, education and life modeling to its members (Murdock, 1967 cited in ibid). Families have been the most important institutions from which people grow into adults and later establish families of their own. Taking a similar view, Basela (2004) advocates that in a family, the most beneficial institution in the world which cannot be compared to any other institution in terms of positive advantages for both adults and children. In addition to this, for health family, ability of couples to communicate their needs, demands and preferences should be taken into account. For many years family has been a good center and assurance of human beings survival (ibid). However, recent changes in lifestyles, technology and attitude toward the choice of forms of marriage, family life and life in general around the world have changed the way family manage conflicts and some cases leading to the breakdown of the strong family ties have been frequent reported. Marriage has become hard to bear and has led to persistent marital tensions, conflicts and violence in families (Neubeck, 1991). Parentis antisocial behavior lead to lower parental involvement in care and upbringing of children which is shown by poor monitoring of children's behavior (Fomby & Cherline, 2007).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Marital conflicts

Marital conflicts are inevitable and tend to happens when marital communications are not constructive as a result of men and women's interests are not similar (Tavakolizadeh, Nejatian & Soori, 20014). In agreement, Mukashema and Sapsford, (2012) found that marital conflict is a conflict occurring in a marriage (family) between couples and which can indicate sexual disagreement, child minding difference, temperamental differences and even religious conflict of interest. Marital conflicts have been reported to have many consequences including insecure attachment style, depression, sexual dysfunction disorders, anxiety disorders; physical health problems (hypertension), chronic pain and ischemic heart diseases (Brock, & Lawrence, 2011;Tavakolizadeha, Nejatianb, Soori, 2014; Galinsky & Waite, 2014). Previous researches suggested that parental conflicts at home that observed today seems has long been part of life of family (Cheng, 2010; Arfaie, Mohammad, & Sohrabi, 2013). However, marital conflicts can influence the family atmosphere and endanger the psychological health of children whereby in turn these conditions may lead to rebels and antisocial behaviours in the children's adulthood (Tavakolizadeh et al., 2014). According to Levine (1986), current levels of parental conflicts reflect a breakdown in the moral structure of many families. Children who witness conflict between parents by their names have been labeled the "silent," "forgotten," "unintended" victims of adult to adult domestic violence (Grovel et al, 1993).

2.2 National evidence of marital conflicts (cases reported)

Tanzania likewise, experience couples conflicts that affect directly or indirect children. For instance about 275 cases of serious marital conflicts have been reported every three months in Dar es Salaam alone (Natihaika, 2000). In 1993 alone, the number of marital conflict cases were handled in primary courts of Dar es Salaam was 42 (Manzese), 125 (Ilala) and 300 (Temeke). Between 1989 and 1993 about 338 cases of parental conflict were registered at the primary court in Songea-Urban (Mhagama, 1994); and Natihaika (2000) revealed that there has been an increase in numbers of people seeking aids because of marital discord. Extensive researches conducted in Tanzania by civil organizations such as the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) on marital conflicts reports a number of marital cases reported and that Magomeni primary court received 118 matrimonial cases in 1997 and the number has risen to 422 cases by 1999 (TAMWA, 1999, 2006, 2009). The Women's Legal Aid Center (WLAC) annual report (2006) shows that there were a total of 1479 types of matrimonial cases out of which were 3510 cases were domestic violence, land disputes and interference. The nature of these conflicts were reported all over the country including: Songea (974 cases), Morogoro (118 cases), Arusha (102 cases), Tanga (76 cases), Iringa (68 cases), Shinyanga (42 cases), Kiteto (18 cases), Moshi (12 cases) and Mwanza (2 cases). According to this organization, there is a big problem of women not reporting their marriage woes to the relevant authority for various reasons: women are worried about being divorced, but they do not know their rights, this implies that parental conflicts are increasing in numbers at a unnoticeable rate due to some cases are not reported thus, the number may be higher than in various reports (TAMWA, 2006).

Previous studies have revealed that currently family life in Tanzania has changed dramatically at an alarming rate and that family conflicts rate has skyrocketed and women have surged into workplace (Materu, 2009; Kania, 2009; TAMWA, 2006). As the result, family life in Tanzania has become more diverse than it was used to be a generation ago. These changes in the family have not affected not only the form of the family life but also the psychological wellbeing of the children. This is contrary to the families of traditional society whereby parental conflicts were considered as the shame and failure of marital relationship (Basela, 2008). As the consequence, currently in Tanzania, many children have resorted to live in the streets and children's centers following frequent and persistence of parents' quarrels. According to Materu (2009), children have forced to live on the streets due to marital conflicts. The study showed that children have been forced to live on the streets due to marital conflicts and about 50% of street children who were interviewed complain that they were forced to live on the streets due to their parents' frequent quarrels. Scholars have denoted the effects of such conflicts to children in their daily life while living with quarreled parents, the children lack of parental protection, care, love as well as denial of educational rights (Cheng, 2010; Arfaie et al., 2013). Quarreled-parents fail to pay school fees, and providing necessary school materials.

Parents fail to pay school fees and providing necessary school equipments, all these have resulted to drop out and children engagement in delinquent behaviours, such as smoking marijuana, teenage sexual practices, robbery (Howard, 1995). Children from homes with marital conflicts are likely to develop a numbers of antisocial behaviors. Despite various researches touch problems of marital conflicts in Tanzania, with know little about coping strategies and no systematic research dealing with this problem, however, this paper aim to go farther on the daily coping strategies that children deploy for their survival and addressing problems facing children living in marital conflict homes as well as how affected in coping with them and which effective coping should used for parents and children.

2.3 Marital conflict conceptual framework

This study draws on the conceptual framework as proposed by Cummings and Cummings (1988), and Bradbury and Finchman (1987, 1989) described a number of influences on how children cope with angry adults, including the stimulus characteristics of the anger episode and the characteristic of the children. Because most marital conflicts are characterized by some degree of anger or hostility, the Cummings and Cummings conceptual framework can give an insight into factors that influence how children cope with this type of stressor. This framework focuses on the child's attempt to understand and respond to an episode of marital conflict. Parental conflict is conceptualized as a stressor that leads to an attempt by the child to understand and cope with conflict (Bretherton, Firtz, Zahn-Waxler & Ridgeway, 1990), this paper also propose that both cognition and affect serve appraisal functions and guide the child's coping behavior. However, Cumming and Cummings framework stand on cognitive-contextual framework for understanding children's responses marital conflicts, on the other hand this paper has included affective-context for coping with parental conflicts because children develop their own responses to the marital conflict as the most effective means of reaction, this can be either by coping in negative or positive responses.

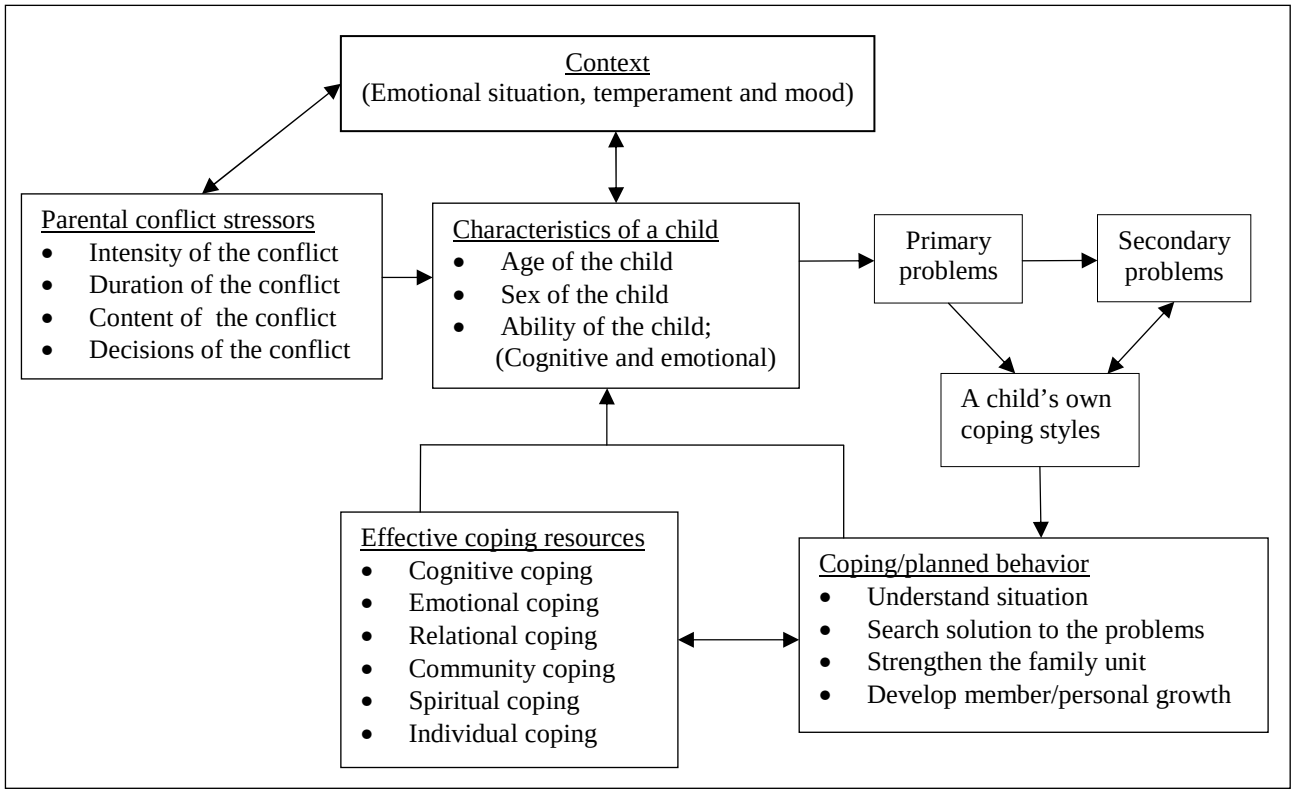


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for coping modified from Cummings and Cummings (1988)

The conceptual framework was modified to express the process of which the children of marital conflict homes go through, starting with context that explain all environments, circulate the life of a child, and connecting to her or his characteristics; age, sex and ability to respond to parental conflict stresses emanating from frequent parents fighting, with combination of all those characteristics and marital tussles, the child may develop problems which mostly form primary problems, and if remain uncontrollable is probably will develop to secondary problems that much worsen the life the children, through both primary and secondary levels of problems children react instantly to stresses by forming their own ways of dealing with family stresses other than that if the outcome of these inexperienced coping strategies will be controlled by planned behaviors or coping behaviors with enough and appropriate coping resources, on time in the long run, the children will manage to restore her good character or self-efficacy according to his, her age, sex, and ability to handle life with good mood, personality and experience that facilitate the growth and development of the child to adult with acceptable behaviors. (cf. Fig.1), which explain problems and coping strategies of children diagrammatically.

3. Purpose of the study

The paper explored uncovered strategies employed by children in coping with marital conflicts in their homes. More specifically, the study intended to achieve the following: i) identify problems facing children of homes with marital conflicts, ii) explore coping strategies used by children, iii) analyze ways of adjusting stresses of children of marital conflicts homes.

4. Materials and method

4.1 Context

The study was carried out in Tanga City (in Tanga region), Tanzania, based on the premises that the city was ranked highest with a good number of reported cases of children from homes with marital conflicts in Tanga region in 2007. Also, TAMWA (2009) has documented a total of 76 cases of marital conflicts in Tanga City which was more than other administrative councils in Tanga region.

4.2 Sample and procedures

The study employed purposive, stratified sampling, simple random sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The purposive sampling was made to obtain social–workers, who contract daily in solving problems of marital conflicts, and custodians of children's rights by virtue of their office and work. Also, class teachers and/or school

counsellors because they had relevant and reliable information about problems facing children of homes with marital conflicts at schools. Stratified sampling was used to obtain teachers and/or counsellors, to obtain schools, the following procedures were used: 1) stratified primary and secondary schools 2) metropolis and outskirt schools depend on economic situation of the parents of homes with conflicts. The simple randomly technique was used to obtain couples who were lived under one roof experiencing conflicts and turnout for conflicts resettling. Snowball technique was used to obtain children of couples who attain services from social welfare offices. Also random sampling was used for children who were at schools and experienced parental conflict very often at their homes.

4.3 Data collection

This study is based on multiple methods for collecting information including survey questionnaires, structured interview, focus groups discussion, and documentary review. Survey questionnaires with open-ended questions administered to class teachers or/and school counsellors and couples of homes with marital conflicts, interview tools were designed to obtain information from social workers who were engaged in solving marital conflicts to children of homes with marital conflicts to obtain details and feelings of the parental conflicts stress and embankment in solving problems. Discussion was made with children of homes with marital conflicts and lastly passed on various documents details cases for six months.

5. Results

A total of 100 respondents were expected to participate, 98 respondents were fully participated, 26 parents or couples were in conflicts, 36 children of marital conflict homes, 30 class teachers or school counsellors, 4 were social workers.

5.1 Participant (s) demographic profile

The categories of respondents in this study include age/sex, education level, occupation, religions types of marriage and duration marriage, the information can be summarized; first children with age group 5-18 years comprised 18 (50%) boys and 18 (50%) girls, while age group 5-14 years were 8 (22.3%) boys and 7 (19.4%) girls, the children of this group were pre-school and primary school pupils. Other group was 15-18 years which included 10 (27.7%) boys and 11 (30.6%) girls and the children of this group were secondary school students.

Second, parents of age 21-35 years counted 14 (53.8%) while age 36-45 years accounted for 9 (34.6%) and 46-60^{+} was 3 (11.5%). In terms of level of education level 4 (13.3%) of sampled couple did not have any formal education, whereas 14 (46.6%) couples were primary school leavers and 8 (26.6%) were secondary leavers and 4 (13.3%). On the employment, the 16 (61.5%) couples were unemployed and 6 (23.0%) were self-employed and 4 (15.3%) were government employed. Additionally, ten couples were from polygamous families and 16 were monogamous families and inter-religious couples were 17 (65.4%) and same religion 9(34.6%) and the age of conflict ranged 5 and above. The each age categories vary depends on the interest of child nurture, preparation for matrimonial entrance and optimum love relationships as well as emotional control to go with interests of every individual.

Third, 15 (50.0%) teachers were primary school teachers, males 4 (13.3%) and 12 (39.9%) females, and 15(50.0%) were secondary teachers, males 7 (23.3%) and females 7 (23.3%). On the level of education, 15 (50.0%) teachers had certificates in teaching and 15(50.0%) had a diploma in education. Teaching experience ranged 5-20^{+} years for both primary and secondary teachers. Furthermore, only 3 female teachers had attended a course related to social affairs which was the school counselling. Lastly, one (25.0%) social welfare officer had advanced diploma, 1(25.0%) had a postgraduate diploma 2 (50.0%) was ordinary diploma in social welfare, working experience range to 10-26. All these are displayed in Table 1:

Table 1: Participant(s) demographic profile

Characteristic of study group	Male	%	Female	%
Children	18	50.0	18	50.0
5-14	8	22.3	7	19.4
15-18	10	27.7	11	30.6
Primary school level	8	22.3	7	19.4
Secondary school level	10	27.7	11	30.6
Polygamous families	5	13.8	8	22.3
Monogamous families	13	36.1	10	27.7
Parents/couples	13	50.0	13	50.0
21-35	7	26.9	7	26.9
36-45	5	19.2	4	15.3
45-60+	2	7.6	1	3.8
Education levels				
Non primary leavers	2	7.6	2	7.6
Primary leavers	9	34.6	11	42.3
Secondary leavers	4	15.3	3	11.5
Above secondary leavers	3	11.5	2	7.6
Occupation				
Unemployed couples	9	34.6	7	26.9
Self-employed couples	4	15.3	2	7.6
Government employed couples	1	3.8	3	11.5
Marital affairs				
Polygamous couples	5	19.2	5	19.2
Monogamous couples	8	30.7	8	30.7
Religion affairs				
Inter-religion couples	8	30.7	9	34.6
Same religion couples	4	15.3	5	19.2
Duration of marriage				
6-10	3	11.5	3	11.5
11-15	8	30.7	8	30.7
15-20+	2	7.6	2	7.6
Teachers experience	15	50.0	15	50.0
24-35	6	20.0	8	30.7
36-49	6	20.0	10	33.3
Primary school teachers	4	13.3	12	39.9
Secondary school teachers	7	23.3	7	23.3
Social welfare officers				
24-35	0	0.0	2	50.0
36-49	1	25.0	1	25.0
Ordinary diploma	0	0.0	2	50.0
Advance diploma	1	25.0	0	0.0
Postgraduate diploma	0	0.0	1	25.0

5.2 Daily problems of children from homes with marital conflicts

The results this of study have presented in table 2, in which presents the problems faced by children in marital conflicts homes in terms of frequencies and percentages obtained from parents' and teachers' questionnaires. Table 2 shows that majority (96.4%) of teachers and parents viewed children from marital conflicts homes lacking basics needs like food, shelter aid, clothes and school facilities, while (80.3%) indicated lack of parental affection. Other problems faced by children of marital conflicts homes as indicated by parents and teachers were sadness and hopelessness or depression (83.9%), inadequate of health services (78.5%), poor academic performance (96.4%), frequent crying and anger (78.5%), as well as harassments from parents (83.9%) were deviant behaviors (71.4%) and lastly were sleeping disorder (53.6%), all these show that every respondents know there are a lot of problems facing children in homes with parental conflicts.

Table 2: Daily problems of children from home with marital conflicts

Problems faced by Children of Marital Conflict Homes	Parents (n=26)	Class Teachers (n=30)	Total (n=56)
Poor academic performance	24 (92.3)	30 (100.0)	54 (96.4)
Frequent crying and anger	17 (65.3)	27 (90.0)	44 (78.5)
Sleeping disorder	12 (46.2)	18 (60.0)	30 (53.6)
Harassments from parents	25 (96.1)	22 (73.3)	47 (83.9)
Deviant behavior	20 (76.9)	20 (66.6)	40 (71.4)
Poor parental affection	18 (69.2)	27 (90.0)	45 (80.3)
Inadequate provision of basic needs	9 (34.6)	26 (86.6)	35 (62.5)
Poor health care	19 (73.0)	25(83.3)	44 (78.5)
sadness and hopelessness or depression	25 (96.1)	22 (73.3)	47 (83.9)

In Table 3, the children who were interviewed revealed that, one of the big problem was obtaining basic needs which counted (81.5%) while getting school facilities measured (76.3%), frequent crying and anger (68.4%), but seemed that boys were felt angry than girls, while girls crying most of time, even during the interview, and group discussion were full in tears, harassments from parents were (63.1%), also misbehaving of children counted (63.4%), depression or sadness and hopelessness (63.1%), other problems were poor health care (60.5%) and lack of parental affections (57.8%) and sleeping disorder was (57.8%).

Table 3: Daily problems of children from homes with marital conflicts based on gender

Problems facing Children	Male (n=19)	Female (n=19)	Total (n=38)
Provision of academic facilities	13 (34.2)	16 (42.2)	29 (76.3)
Frequent crying and anger	9 (23.6)	17 (44.7)	26 (68.4)
Harassments from parents	6 (15.7)	18 (47.3)	24 (63.1)
Sleeping disorder	7 (18.4)	15(39.4)	22 (57.8)
Deviant behavior	14 (36.8)	12 (31.5)	26 (63.4)
Poor parental affection	10 (26.3)	12 (31.5)	22 (57.8)
Inadequate provision of basic needs	12 (31.5)	19 (50.0)	31 (81.5)
Poor health care	11 (28.9)	12 (31.5)	23 (60.5)
sadness and hopelessness (depression)	16 (42.2)	8 (21.1)	24 (63.1)

In comparison to female children had more problems compared to male children. For example, 18 (47.3%) of females children out of 19 (50.0%) had experienced harassment problems from their parents. seventeen (44.7%) of female children reported to had frequent cry and anger problems and also performed poorly in academic performance 16 (42.2%) as compare to male children 9 (23.6%). On the contrary deviate behavior problem found most in male children 14 (36.8%). The study also was interested to explore problems encountered by children from marital conflicts homes across the child's age. The findings are indicated and summarized in figure 2.

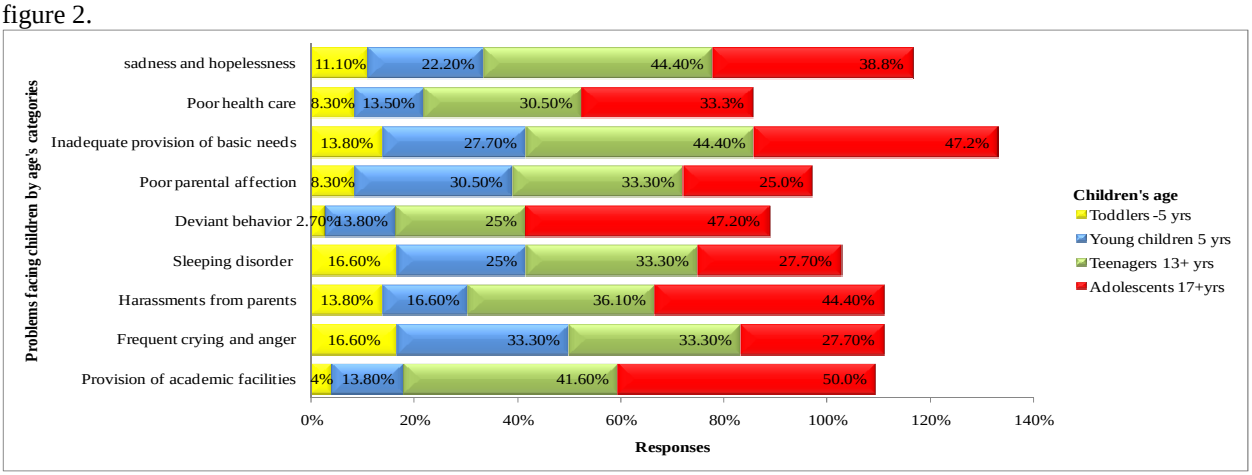


Fig.2. Responses of each age category of children of homes with marital conflicts.

Figure 2, show children of marital conflict homes responded more on academic performance and facilities as the big problem for teenage and adolescents (91.6%) for all.

5.3 Coping strategies of children of homes with marital conflict

In table 4, data shows that types of coping strategies applied more by children of marital conflicts was to run away from home (60.5%) and engage in sexual relations (55.2%). Next disregard of parental the conflicts (52.7%), others were engaging in petty business, joining groups and seeking emotional support (57.8%), seeking physical support(57.8%) and the last were alcoholism/drugs addiction (21.0%) and using of social media for talking (44.7%).

Table 4: Coping strategies opted with children of homes with marital conflicts (n/38x100).

Types of Coping Strategies	Children of Homes with Marital Conflicts (n=38)				
	Frequency				Total
	Boys	Percentage	Girls	Percentage	%
Using alcoholic and drugs	8	21.0	0	0	21.0
Using social media regularly	6	15.7	11	28.9	44.7
Engage in sex relations	5	13.1	16	44.7	55.2
Seeking socio-emotion supports	10	26.3	12	31.5	57.8
Running away from homes	17	44.7	6	18.4	60.5
Joining gang groups	9	23.6	3	13.2	31.5
Seeking physical supports	15	33.3	7	18.4	57.8
Doing petty business	14	36.8	4	10.5	47.3
Disregarding of the parental-conflict	13	34.2	6	15.7	52.7
Aggressively engaged	9	23.6	3	7.9	31.5

Table 4 presents that boys are running away from homes (44.7%) and seek physical support (33.3%) as well as doing small business (36.8%) while girls fall on engaging in sexual relations (28.9%), seek social and emotional support (31.5%) and also use so much social media to search for relieve (28.9%) but girls do not being involve in severe drinking thus is counted (0.0%), so for this case there were difference in coping determining the sex of the child as explained in figure 3, that children responded differently according family with conflict handling of gender issues during the quarrels.

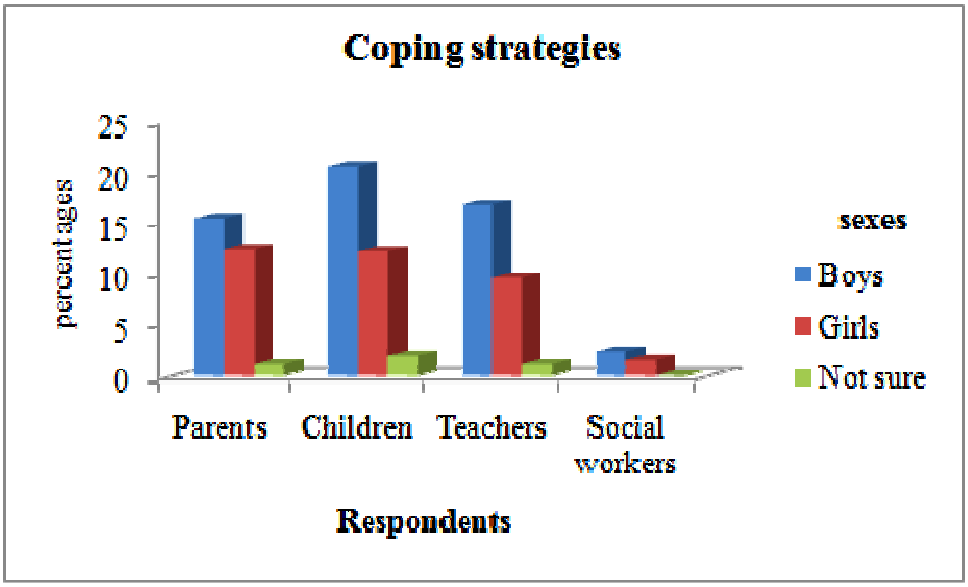


Fig. 3. Coping strategies used by childen based on their sex.

The respondests of all categories argued that coping strategies differ in terms of child stage of development, parents and teachers accepted that adolescents are older enough to understand that their in pain on account of marital conflicts, and for young children, they are two young to understand to control their reactions, as noticed on figure 4 below, explianing the developmental categories of chidren to be able to cope with parental conflicts.

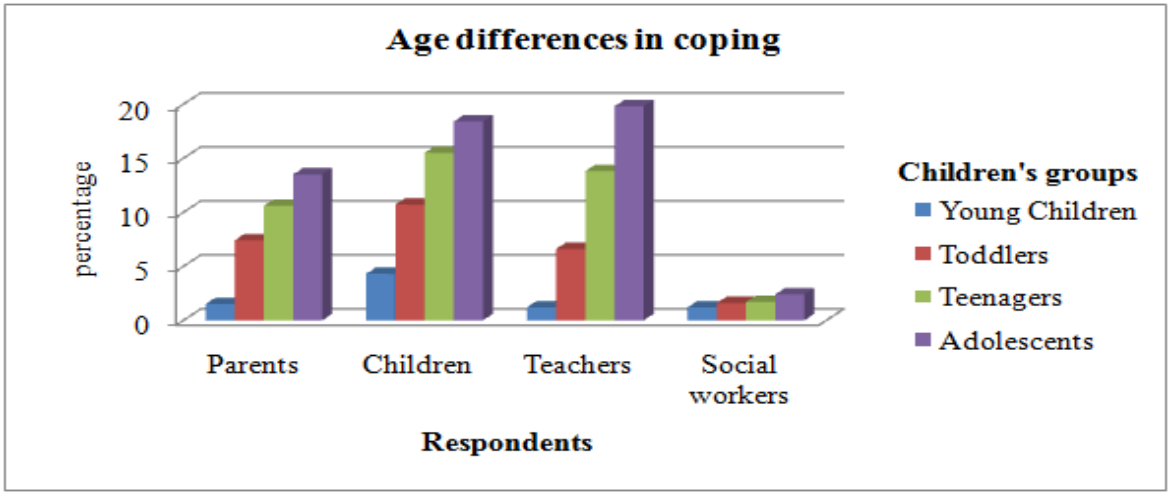


Fig.4. Children's age differences in coping with marital conflicts

6. Discussion

It cannot be denied that children from marital conflicts home differ greatly in several aspects, such as personality, bodily characteristics, cultural and religious beliefs, and ethnic background. Nevertheless, they are like all other children in the sense that they have three fundamental needs which, by and large, remain the same through their developmental stages that is all the children have physical cognitive and emotional needs. For instance, if Jean Jacques Rousseau was right in saying that children were created good and that it was the society which corrupted them (Kania, 2009), then it is equally true to argue that changed home environmental circumstances greatly influence the changes that take place in the behavior of children who resort into different types of behavior or who, because of circumstances beyond their control, find themselves in the street bagging. The life of marital conflicts homes' children life in general, centers on survival strategies based on creating mean of making living. This is so because marital conflicts homes' children are confronted by a variety of problems.

This study revealed that marital conflicts home children, apart from facing emotional, health, physical and psychological problems, are also in constant struggle emanating from lack of basic needs for survival such as food, shelter, health and clothing. Marital conflicts homes' children go through the struggle of providing themselves with basic needs Table 5 presents the problems faced by children in marital conflicts homes in terms of frequencies and percentages obtained from parents' and teachers' questionnaires.

Data in table 2 shows that majority (96.4%) of teachers and parents viewed children from marital conflicts homes suffer from academic performance, while (62.5%) revealed lacking basics needs like food, shelter aid, clothes and school facilities, while (80.3%) indicated lack of parental affection. Other problems faced by children of marital conflicts homes as indicated by parents and teachers were depression (83.9%), lack of health services (78.5%), poor academic performance (80.2%), frequent crying and anger (78.5%), as well as harassments from parents (83.9%) and lastly were deviant behaviors (71.4%).

Apart from questionnaires findings above, children of marital conflicts homes and social welfare workers were interviewed specifically to know daily problems faced by them. First, more than three quarters of children and social welfare workers identified frequent crying. This was also discovered by the researcher during interview sessions with children of marital conflicts as most of them resorted to crying and wetting their face with tears throughout the sessions, moreover the study revealed that girls crying more when compared to boys.Second, sleeping problem was also identified as more than half of children interviewed confirmed that they had some sleeping disorders. Children of chronic marital conflicts homes claimed to experience more difficulties getting enough sleep compared to others. For example, children complained that every time they observed their parents quarreling, at the night they would experience nightmares and anxiety, others thus felt insecure. As a result some would later sleep in the classrooms and thus lose academic concentrations. According to Nolen-Hoeksema (2004) study, children of interparetal conflicts had sleeplessness problem.

Third, about half of children and majority of social workers identified lack of food as another problem they face. Food is a primary necessity for human existence but was a problem in marital conflicts homes children, food was indeed a problem. Children in marital conflicts homes did not have meals regularly because, due to their parents' misunderstanding, they had no reliable sources of food. Occasionally they managed to feed for themselves. During focus group discussion, some children claimed that they had to do some jobs/works in exchange for food as their fathers refused to give their mothers some money to buy food, this resulting to no food hence, there was no food at home. These jobs/works included fetching water, drying sardines along the

shores, washing utensils and cleaning adjacent areas. This means that life for children from marital conflicts homes was not easy.

A child had to work to obtain his/her daily meals. This suggests that survival within the marital conflicts homes triggered even more the prevalence of child labour. Others revealed that women vendors of food in various parts of the city were another source of their meals. Sometimes, such children depended entirely on leftovers or getting little food after collecting and dumping rubbishes form food vending places like in local market. Other sources through which these children got food included visiting near relatives, friends to ask for food whereas they got little food to eat without being full. These children mentioned that sometimes they had to cook thrown stale sardines that were picked from shores. It would be argued that the milieu in which marital conflicts homes' children lived and the kind of food they ate could be a cause of under nutrition for their health improvement.

Fourth, one third of children in this study explained and majority of social welfare workers identified that parents' harassment and beatings as one of the main problem in homes. Although life generally on the marital conflict family homes is tough, parent harassment was also a big problem as could be remarked by one child:

> It is about five years now since conflict started in our home. So for all these years I have been receiving all sorts of harassment from my mother...After my mother being beaten by my father...what follows is to beat me harshly, sometimes for unknown reasons. Yes, sometimes I have to struggle on my own for food. But my mother's harassment is really a headache.

Mother or father of marital conflict homes pervaded the narratives of fear by children in the conflict homes. Other parents, in particular, are apparently greatly feared and categorized as the main "enemies" of youngsters at the conflicts homes. The following was commented by a 12 year-old boy:

There are many wrong doings at home resulting from their fight, our parents beat us severely, chasing us out of house at midnight, throwing our thing, hitting us aggressively. Sometimes my father said I would turn into compost the next time he would see me watching them as they fight. That is, I am going to die, right? One of the girls at the age of 12 revealed

> My father after having a quarrel with my mother, he always beats us, even though, you have express regret for any slight wrong doing, he beats us harshly, I remember a day I was holding a water mug which by accident dropping from my hand and break into pieces, he raised up and beat me with slapping and hit with his clenched fist, he did not listen me asking forgiveness, it seems as the revenge of the their quarrels

A marital conflict homes girl aged 15 years summed up life on the marital conflicts homes in two words:

> Struggle and oppression, the struggle is to fill your belly every day and the oppression is to exist in home. Younger sisters and brothers straggle hard. It is dangerous in the marital conflicts homes to lie down in the early hours, without knowing what tomorrow will bring, because you don't know when the parents' conflict will be resolved. When it's time to sleep, it is really bad. I am afraid of sleeping at home because suddenly over night parents may start fighting sometimes using dangerous weapons like knives or hard instruments.

It was also found that 60% of children participated in this study had been beaten by either fathers or mothers for allegedly watching them fighting and sometimes for unknown reasons. While it is true that marital conflict homes children sometimes involved in defending their mother not be beaten by their fathers by shouting or fighting back, fathers tend to assume that they were joining hands with their mothers against their fathers, and so fathers decided to torture their children. Their proximity to their mother is considered a reason enough to punish them or take them to security office accusing them for attacking or stealing their money, as an 18 year-old boy commented that interviewed:

> I was sleeping on the floor when my father approached. He asked me on who stole the money from his trousers pocket. He claimed that he had left his trousers on the bed as he was taking bath and when I said I did not know anything, he severely punished me. Finally after long quarreling he took me to the nearby security office where three policemen started to beat me all over. They kept on saying; "say where you take the money" while beating me.

It was revealed that, even though the acts of harassing the children by their own parents are illegal, in reality most children of marital conflicts homes do not know that their rights have been violated, and are intimidated by their own father or mother so they do not complain. In addition, they do not have a family member to intervene on their behalf.

Fifth, fear and tension was also mentioned by a quarter of children interviewed. Teachers and social welfare workers had the same thought that, For example, children due to parental conflicts seemed to be more afraid and much worried which increased strain to children and they would trust no one. This was also

experienced by the researcher where it took more time of building trust in these children. In focus group discussions it was revealed that children were in fear of loneliness if the conflict would lead to parental separation while others were afraid of invisible things like darkness, loud voices, giant persons, nightmares as they associated this with their parental conflicts.

The study found that poor performance is the one of the leading problems of the child from marital conflict families, the denote (96.4) of the responses of the informants of all categories who revealed that children of marital conflict family could not concentrate on their studies or listen to teachers attentively in the classroom, and they come to school with no school necessary learning resources, the score poorly, become truants and drop out of school, and also parents stop making follow-up of children's school progress or contacting teachers. It was also found that children lose their memory and thinking ability due to being deeply frustrated and stressed. They express, emotion and anger and their thinking patterns change often which make them do things messily without taking care. The girls suffer most from the problem because of doing chores at home with no parental guidance.

This study identified that some girls from marital conflict families entered into premature sexual relationships. It was disclosed, become prostitutes, especially girls from chronic marital conflict families, putting them at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and, at time they get pregnant and create another problem as a one respondent commented that;

> It is easier for our brothers; they might be able to survive in the marital conflict homes even by sleeping outside the house at night. Girls get more problems for example, look sometimes we want to escape from our parents fighting by seeking shelter with neighbors, but at neighboring houses sometimes we get forced by older boys to engage in sexual relation against our will, we don't have a choice because if they don't want them, they beat you and you can get pregnant and they reject you.

Out of 19 girls from marital conflict homes interviewed, 5 (26.3%) of them disclosed that they had been pregnant one or more times in their lives, and these girls had had very little choice concerning the timing, the partner and circumstances surrounding conception. The factors contributing to their pregnancy included rape, poor socio-economic situation and lack of access to contraception

A 16-year girl once alleged that;

> My parents we quarrelling most of time, I decided to leave home and to find another option for living, I found one young man, who had promised to marry me and he promised that I would live a happier life, he rented a room for me and used to give me little money to spend but he hid from me the secrecy of having his own children and wife, thereafter, I conceived, he deserted me and then I realized he was a married man. The life became worse and I decided to go back home when I was about to deliver my baby.

This denotes that girls live under miserable conditions that create a lot of problems for them as this girl was lied o by a young man about being married and with no pity he abandoned the pregnant teenager with no food. Therefore the solution to the secondary source of problems was to go back to the primary sources of problems with the secondary one that increased the problems. After exploring the problems of children from marital conflicts homes in general, the study was interest to examine specifically problems across the gender. I was thought that a boy child and girl child could have different problems. The findings are summarized in the Table, 4.

According to the in table 4, female children had more problems compared to male children. For example 18 (47.3%) of female children faced harassment problem from their parents. seventeen (44.7%) of female children reported to had frequent cry and anger problems and also performed poorly in academic performance 16 (42.2%) as compare to male children 13 (34.2%). On the contrary deviate behavior problem found most in male children 14 (36.8%). The study also was interested to explore problems encountered by children from marital conflicts homes across the child's age. Generally, It revealed that respondents perceived that young children from family homes with marital conflicts face more problems than adolescents, for example, the study respondents said that young children were crying, and being beaten and abused with their parents and other adult persons, while adolescent were reprimanded more, working a lot at home with no rest also caring for young children and all performed poorly academically as a result dropped out of school.**5.1 Coping strategies of children in marital conflict homes** In this paper, two types of coping strategies are determined as the predominant strategies that people, typically employ to deal with the problems, according to Falkman & Lazarus (1984), coping strategies refer to the specific efforts both behavioral and psychological that people employ to master, tolerate or minimize stressful events. Coping strategies of children from homes with marital conflicts mostly undergo psychological process which according to Lazarus and Folkman, (1984), argued that the persons are constantly changing cognitive demands and behavioral efforts tom manage specific internal or external demands that are taxing or excessive, thus coping is an attempt to manage uncomfortable situations, and is a function of both the environment and individual's cognitive appraisal of the situation.

According to Rizzini, (2003), the coping strategies that these children employ can be seen as a reflection of important competencies if the child. The combination of environment and personality traits enable highly stressed and troubled children to develop numbers of skills in their lives. Also she argued that coping strategies used by children from homes with marital conflicts to encounter their difficult life at home and argued that coping with marital conflicts means obtaining food, clothes, and shelter and health services and protection from parental violence. It depends on the personal strength of the child's resourcefulness, resilience, determine their survival. Inside this is undertaking at discussing different coping strategies adopted by children from home with marital conflicts which emanating from their problems in their homes.

Coping is a psychological process in which the person is constantly changing cognitive demands and behavioural efforts to manage specific internal or external demands that are taxing or excessive (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Coping is thus an attempt to manage uncomfortable situations, and is a function of both the environment and the individual's cognitive appraisal of the situation.Children of marital conflicts experience serious social, emotional and physical dangers. They are exposed to high levels of parental violence, victimization and sexual harassments. These children are constantly confronted with multiple problems in their environment. The coping strategies that these children employ can be seen as the reflection of important competencies of the child. The combination of environmental and personality traits enable highly stressed and troubled children to develop a number of skills in their lives (Rizzin, 2003).

The coping strategies used by children in marital conflicts homes to counter their difficult life at homes. Rizzin (2003) argues that coping with marital conflicts homes means obtaining food, clothes, shelter and protecting against parental violence and health services. It depends on the personal strength of the child's resourcefulness (the ability to solve problems quickly and efficiently with the available resources) and resilience (the ability to do well in spite of difficult circumstances) which determine his/her survival. Resourcefulness and resilience would depend upon the child's creativity, hard work, intelligence and concern for one another. It also depends on the peer group, which has a strong influence on the marital conflicts home children because of the child's need for acceptance, belonging and protection. The group often determines the process of change, socialization and development of marital conflicts homes children, by providing emotional and material support. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that the individual and the situation cannot be separated. They further point out that coping is not outcome independent but rather an attempt to manage the situation. The children were interviewed and through focus group discussions with added filling from parents, teachers and social welfare officers and the study revealed different coping strategies used by children from marital conflicts homes as are summarized in the Table 6. The findings from interviews were supported by focus group discussion findings that children explored a number of coping strategies in order to survival in the marital conflicts homes environment as follows.

- Being attracted in alcoholic and drug addiction**:**

During the focus group discussion session it was revealed that sometimes children engaged themselves in drinking local brews, sniffing tobacco powder, petroleum (benzodiazepines), smoking cigarettes, Marijuana, chewed leaves (common known as "mirungi"), take in Cocaine and heroin to relieve the anxiety and tension or anger. Most youth indicated to combine sedative drugs used to relieve anxiety and induce sleep and other substances that produced slight stimulation to induce body vigor in order to forget their problems. Perhaps children were able to access to this because the town was bordered with other countries. The illicit drugs tend to cause behavior changes like aggressive behavior, feeling sexier, impaired judgments, (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). Youths became jobless and stayed dependent on unreliable earning sources.

- Engaging in romantic relationship

It was revealed that some children engaged in relationship with the opposite sex to compensate for the loss of parental love, recognition, happiness and calmness in home. They thus spent romantic moments with their boyfriends or girlfriends in order to be soothed through romantic stories were regarded to cheer them up. It was also claimed that a few children involved into same sex love relationship behavior learnt in their gangs' group which they claimed it helped them to forget conflict home situation.

Girls in marital conflicts homes have been exposed to teen pregnancy risks as discussed in focus groups, most of girls had used a variety of self –distractive coping strategies that resulting to unexpected pregnancies and when some of them had delivered, decided to abort or commit infanticide by dumping the infants in dustbins, pit latrines or dumps, they also attempted to commit suicide, especially when her sex-partner could not afford to pay for an illegal abortion or after all means failed. They used as coping strategies to avoid future hardship, suffering, and parents' punishment

- Being engaging in petty business

The study revealed that children from marital conflicts homes did not stick in one activity for a long time but they shift here and there, doing several things within a short period of time. They shift from one activity to

another, however, depended on the amount of pay and security available and the restrictions placed on their social interactions. They were involved in selling scraps, sweets, water and other items or vend their bosses' items such as juice, ice creams, groundnuts and coffee with nougats along the road, especially at bus terminal for meager pay. Others worked daily along the shores sorting, drying and packing sardines in sacks and others help to boil salt, digging lime stones and fishing. An 11 year-old on boy had the following to admit:

> Since it is difficult to stay at home due to violence, I spend my time selling sardines around the towns. I get my food after selling my sardines. If could not pick enough sardines left behind along the shore. I joined fishermen for all night to fish in the ocean. In the afternoon, I look for boxes, scraps and empty bottles to sell. If someone gives me money, I buy food and go to cinema. Sometimes I also take home sugar or flour for my younger sister and mother.

It found that children depend on themselves to feed and sometimes buying foodstuff such as four, beans, spinach and other items to support family and drop out in school, most of them are boys who engage in such activities rather than girls and those are matured enough use this strategy to cope with family changes.

- Seeking social support from friends and relatives

It was revealed that children of marital conflicts homes sought support from friends, relatives and strange persons without regard to the protective or vulnerability factors in the environments. Respondents argued that they could get social support provided by the classmates and teachers who befriended them and that social skills helped them to enjoy being with other people. According to Suls & Wallston, (2003), protective factors include psychological reactivity, social support and effective coping skills which help child to tolerate the situation. They were used to ask their peers for help and peers invite to play together as the help of turn them happier

- Seeking emotional support from friends and relatives

The study found that mind healing made children less vulnerable to the marital conflicts situations. Friends forming as a group were likely to prevent slight maladjusted, behavior such as stopping unwanted thoughts and controlling such feelings as wishful thinking, acceptance, positive interpretations or to deny the situation as if does not exist but, most of respondents could not tell adults about their home situation, rather they tell their peers or classmates. Other respondents indicated to obtain needs from relatives like money, clothes and school items.

- Information gathering

Information gathering leads to problem-solving skills. This study revealed that children sought information from peers and teachers on a number of issues. For example, they would seek information from teachers about getting support. Studies on resilience and coping point identified that information gathering is as one of the strategies used by people in adversity. Information gathering informs or teaches skill that provides a solution to a problem. It may include advice, factual input, feedback and actions (House, 1981 cited by Leavy, 1983).

- Joining gang groups

The study found that children from marital conflict homes were joined youth groups in various places or camps commonly known as "Maskani" (these were the formal youth meeting places in evening to share ideas and views) but there were many informal places where gangs meet to play draft, game of cards and matters to be discussed were romantic, thieving and committing crime stores that resulting deviant behaviors such as smoking marijuana, taking drugs addiction, sex drives. The children spend of their time with this youths where they coping the behavior of them. In a focus group discussion respondents' disclosure that:

> Most boys were used to attend sites because of persistence of parent-conflicts in their homes. The matters to be discussed were raised randomly by anyone and most of them are aged then us, but they pursued us to smoke marijuana, to steal with them and to have girl-friends without caring about diseases and denoted that the result of maladjusted behavior was the matter of an individual choice but others were by now misbehaving and involve in committing crime and sent into remand home as it was happened to my friend.

It is evident that the joined groups were accessible easily at all time because of mushrooming of unauthorized camps for youths. Children of marital conflict homes were joined by home exerted pressure to groups with no choice where they were used the strategies learnt in various places had visited to cope with home situation that might contributed much on misbehaving as teachers and social welfare officers commented

- Use of social media for chatting

The study had revealed that children of marital conflicts home use various social media to chat with friend at night during the time of broken asleep, chatting with friends at night hold a while feelings of parental conflicts. This was used most by the children of well-off families and this was also preferred by the girls of marital conflict homes than boys. They could take longer time due to that time tariffs were low or subscribe in bundles that allow to have enough airtime and the friends were chatted to were of both sexes and most them were boys

- Selecting latchkey lifestyle

The study found that some children of marital conflict would chose to live in their home with taking the parental roles as adult persons. This was identified that the children take some necessary responsibilities like cook for young ones, washing their clothes, cleaning the house, buying foodstuff at the market and stay at home most of time looking after their young brothers and sisters and is identified in children of less emotional shocked and those decided on this style of life were matured enough to control themselves

- Running away from home

The study revealed that children of marital conflict run away from home to live with other relatives rather than to live in the streets. Some of respondents had run away to neighbours or relative to get any kind of help, most of the children of marital conflict run away from home were the young children and more of them were boys had been run away from home than girls

> Mother and father were quarreling every time, there is no food to eat at home, we may have one meal a day, I decided to live home and go to live with my uncle and there the situation was not good then I left there to my grandmother who live with another man near to town but sometimes I used to come back home

It denoted that children of marital conflicts homes move to house to house for searching how to survive, as the relatives care them by giving them shelter, food only with no care of other needs like clothes and school items or health service, children move from one place to another to satisfy their needs, however the area of study did have records of street children due to easier for children to get at least food and place to sleep.

The study identified that boys were more likely to use strategies that solve the problem as the first strategy while girls here more likely to use strategies that tend to ask for support from others as the first strategy. Boys engaged in groups but girls did not necessarily join a group of the same sex. Meanwhile, boys may distance themselves from parental conflicts while girls tend to be close. Thus they came with their parents in conflict settlements. Boys are used to run away from homes (44.7%) engaged in drinking, smoking (21.0%) while for girls seemed (0.0%) and doing small business on the streets (36.8%) and girls engaged mostly in sexual relationship (44.7%) as the coping strategies as quoted in table 4.

5.2 The effectiveness of the coping strategies in obtaining daily needs

A variety of coping strategies were employed by those children in their day to day lives. Owing to the nature of the study, it was not possible; however, to establish exactly which strategy played a bigger role. The data gathered by this study showed that those children had to resort to a number of skills and had to accept the family order of the conflicts for their survival. They learned to cope with their fate, begging and all physical constraints. It was through such coping strategies that those children managed to survive in the marital conflicts homes. An analysis of both coping strategies using percentages shows that running away from home was the one was the one most cited by respondents (47.7%). Engaging in petty trade and looking for emotional support ranked second because (39%) respondents cited it as one of their major coping strategies.

Although both problems-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies have different effects on individuals, there is evidence that problem focused coping has a positive effect on the life of the stressed because it actively confronts the problem. In contrast a high level of emotional-focused and escape-avoiding coping strategies is typically associated with poor adaptation to stress because these styles normally do not confront the stressor (Felton & Reverson, 1984, Basela, 2004). However, the effectiveness of the coping strategy depends on the nature of the marital conflict and its intensity. For example, people who cope with stress by minimizing or avoiding the stressful events seem to cope effectively with short-term (Zeidher, 2001in Materu, 2009).

Children from homes with marital conflicts lack choices with respect to alternative coping strategies that enable them to survive but not to improve their welfare. These children seek to mobilize resources and opportunities and combine these with livelihood strategies, the peer group and the people whom the child meets on the first day away from home. Therefore, children from marital conflict homes adjust the mix according to their home circumstances and the intensity of parental conflict, running away, working and doing petty businesses form the basis of the coping strategies, but for them and overlapping them may be added group formation, stealing, information gathering, and use of marijuana. The important thing is the recognition of the multiple coping strategies which the children from marital conflict homes use to ensure their survival and improve their well-being. They may not have cash, but they do have other non-material assets, for instance, their labour, their knowledge and skills, their friends and the natural resources around them. Therefore they recognize those assets, identifying the opportunities offered and where the constraints lie.

There are as many coping strategies for children in marital conflict homes as there are problems emanating from marital conflicts and their sources. While children of conflicting spouses/couples hardly contribute to and are not a part of the sources of these conflicts, they are nevertheless the victims most affected by the ensuring problem that impacts those children physically and emotionally to the extent that they seek refuge and relief outside the family confines. Being unguided and not supported, most if the copping strategies if children from marital conflict homes are descriptive in their nature and can hardly help them have a bright future but can only

lead to, finally criminal gangs, in that regard, children have emotional needs that affect changes in their lives as they try to survive in troubled parental marriage, and such strategies may deepen the intensity of the family conflicts.

7. Conclusion

This paper have come with some recommendation such as there is an need to provide family and parent education at family level by specialists such as social welfare, counselors, community development workers to all communities where there a lot of children with problems or a lot of matrimonial problems through intervention strategies by mobile cinemas, seminar for leaders of villages and hamlets, teachers and other stakeholders of children's affairs and families. This family education may produce researched strategies that provide healthier problem-solving skills for both couples and children, and also, there is a need to have a family court or chambers dealing with family matters, to have a court in a place with special jurisdiction over family disputes, marital and children problems will be heard and a solution found. The family is a nuclear of any society, where human beings are natured and social economic development takes place and so there is a need to make sure they grow up safe from damaging marital conflicts, children should be better safeguarded for the development of society. And newlywed couples or those proposing to get married should seek premarital counseling that would help them to form a strong family and to help the fiancé to lay a strong foundation that would develop marital problem solving skills such as confidence, facts, evidence and confidentiality of family to solve the problems of spouses and children. The fiancés and newlywed couples may in this way be prepared for reality and challenges of marriage before taking the plunge of marriage vows; it would help them to decide on the possible solution of problems. Coping training for both parents and children should be offered with consideration of the part of children as the vulnerable group of marital conflicts who have no ability to control the effects and parents should consider the emotional damage that marital conflicts cause children as well as other problems, and not simply consider physical needs only as the problem as well as the gender of a children in encountering conflict problems.

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